

National Security Program #5

## Keeping Nuclear Weapons out of the Hands of Terrorists

As the 9/11 Commission Report wrote: "The greatest danger of another catastrophic attack in the United States will materialize if the world's most dangerous terrorists acquire the world's most dangerous weapons." There is no greater priority for America's leaders than preventing this from happening. To prevent a nuclear terrorist attack, the United States must dramatically strengthen its efforts to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorists.

### THE PROBLEM

#### Conservatives Failed to Address America's Top Security Concern

There is no greater danger to America than al Qaeda or its allies obtaining a nuclear weapon. With such a weapon, our enemies could orchestrate an attack that might kill hundreds of thousands of people, destroy our economy and change forever the way of life that Americans cherish. Al Qaeda is the top nuclear concern for the C.I.A. because they believe al Qaeda is the threat most likely to use them.<sup>1</sup> Yet, seven years after 9/11, the Bush administration has been lax in its efforts to secure loose nuclear weapons and material, which is the only way to eliminate or minimize the threat of nuclear terrorism.

#### **President Bush and conservatives fail to fund nuclear security programs.**

In 2001, a bipartisan panel working for the Secretary of Energy said terrorists stealing or buying a nuclear weapon pose a "clear and present danger...to American lives and liberties," and it recommended that the United States spend \$3 billion per year for a decade to fully secure all loose nuclear weapons and nuclear material in Russia.<sup>2</sup> The government identified 243 Russian buildings holding enough material to make more than 41,000 nuclear weapons that need improved security.<sup>3</sup> After returning from Russia, one expert reported that there are "finished weapons that are barely protected. I'm talking about doors that have an ordinary padlock on them and sometimes not even that."<sup>4</sup> Despite these immense security threats, the Bush administration has provided only a third of the recommended funding to secure nuclear weapons and material in Russia.<sup>5</sup> At that level of funding, efforts to secure Russia's weapons material may not be complete until the year 2030, leaving the threat of a nuclear terrorist attack hanging over America for another generation.<sup>6</sup>

**There is no coordinated government effort to eliminate this threat.**

In 2005, 9/11 Commission Co-Chairman Thomas Keane recommended that “the President should develop a comprehensive plan and dramatically accelerate the timetable for securing all nuclear weapons-usable material around the world.”<sup>7</sup> In response, Congress created an advisory position to the President responsible for coordinating the government’s efforts to prevent a nuclear attack by terrorists. President Bush, however, has failed to fill this position. Ultimately this means that there is *no* person responsible for organizing the government’s effort to prevent a nuclear attack. This is particularly disturbing considering that an independent report gave the government a “D” in coordinating its strategy to address nuclear terrorism.<sup>8</sup>

**THE SOLUTION**

---

**Aggressive action to meet the threats of nuclear terror**

The gravest threat to America should be treated as such, and real resources and senior personnel should be focused on preventing the unthinkable from happening.

**Secure all loose nuclear weapons and material in Russia by 2012**

Russia remains the country with the most unsecured nuclear material, and working with Russia to protect this material is the most effective way to prevent nuclear terrorism. We already have successful programs to achieve this—the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, also called “Nunn-Lugar,” has already upgraded two thirds of the nuclear weapons storage sites in Russia and has helped deactivate over 7,000 Russian nuclear missiles.<sup>9</sup>

Instead of securing all this material over 26 years, we should provide the funding and the focus to achieve this goal in the next four years. The US should increase funding to the \$3 billion recommended by the Baker-Cutler Commission in 2001, which will allow us to secure loose nuclear material in a timely manner.

**Fix the government bureaucracy to ensure this mission is achieved**

President Bush has recklessly disregarded a federal law establishing the position of Coordinator for Nonproliferation by leaving the job vacant. This has serious consequences—the nonproliferation mission is divided between the State Department, the Department of Energy and the Department of Defense, and as we saw with the intelligence failures leading up to 9/11, stove-piping in these departments often means that there is no one responsible for coordinating their activities. With real presidential leadership, this person can cut through the red tape and get this important mission completed.

## THE ROLLOUT

---

### Ideas for publicizing your commitment to preventing nuclear terrorism

#### **Press Conference with a local organization involved in nonproliferation**

There are organizations working in all 50 states that are participating in nonproliferation projects in the former Soviet Union. A list of these organizations by state can be found at <http://www.stimson.org/cnp/?SN=CT200701241182>. Take a tour of a facility in your district or state and then hold a press conference to discuss the importance of securing nuclear materials and preventing a nuclear attack.

## CRITIQUES & RESPONSES

---

#### ***Why are you calling for more cooperation with Russia at a time when it is exhibiting defiant and aggressive behavior toward U.S. allies like Georgia?***

Russia's actions in Georgia were unacceptable and must be resolved, and I stand firmly with our ally Georgia. But we have to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. The U.S. cannot let this crisis derail progress on the issues that the U.S. and Russia have in common. Nuclear material in the hands of terrorists is the most urgent threat we face, and the U.S. must do everything in its power to ensure this does not happen. Although the U.S. may disagree with Russia on some issues, it is imperative that we engage Russia as much as possible on this nonproliferation issue in order to obtain access to Russian nuclear sites and that we work together to secure them.

#### ***How will the creation of another bureaucratic post, the Coordinator for Nonproliferation, fix the government bureaucracy and make Americans safer?***

Following the attacks on 9/11, we realized that different government agencies failed to share information that might have revealed the attack. In response, the Department of Homeland Security was created to reduce red tape and help the government coordinate its efforts to prevent attacks. The fact is, the United States spends over \$1 billion to prevent nuclear terrorism and needs to spend more. But if you asked the President what individual was responsible for coordinating these efforts, he wouldn't have a response.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> Noaki Schwartz, "Hayden: Next President Should Let the CIA Do Its Job," AP. Sept. 16, 2008

<sup>2</sup> Howard Baker and Lloyd Cutler, "A Report Card on the Department of Energy's Nonproliferation Programs with Russia," The Secretary of Energy Advisory Board, United States Department of Energy.

<sup>3</sup> Amy F. Woolf, "Nonproliferation and Threat Reduction Assistance: U.S. Programs in the Former Soviet Union," Congressional Research Service, Mar. 26, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Howard Baker, "Testimony Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," Mar. 28, 2001

<sup>5</sup> Amy F. Woolf, "Nonproliferation and Threat Reduction Assistance: U.S. Programs in the Former Soviet Union," Congressional Research Service, Mar. 26, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Finlay and Andrew Grotto, "The Race to Secure Russia's Loose Nukes: Progress Since 9/11," The Henry L. Stimson Center and the Center for American Progress, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Kean, "Opening Remarks of Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton," Nov. 14, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Brian Finlay, "Nuclear Terrorism: US Policies to Reduce the Threat of Nuclear Terror," Partnership for a Secure America, Sept. 2008

<sup>9</sup> "The Nonproliferation Scorecard," The Henry L. Stimson Center, updated Mar. 2008